

MASTER OF TELEPATHY *by* EANDO BINDER

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AMAZING

STORIES

GHOST *of* MARS

by FESTUS
PRAGNEL

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DECEMBER
1941 20c

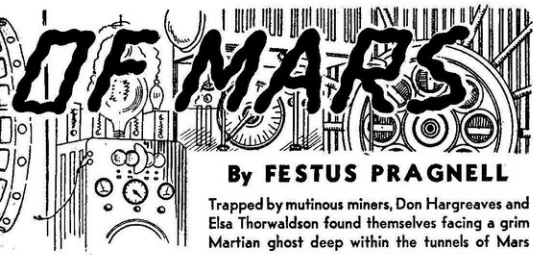
KISS *of* DEATH *by* NEIL R. JONES

VOLUME 12
NUMBER 7

DECEMBER
1941



Without warning, Professor Winterton appeared, apparently seated inside the sphere



By FESTUS PRAGNELL

Trapped by mutinous miners, Don Hargreaves and Elsa Thorwaldson found themselves facing a grim Martian ghost deep within the tunnels of Mars

CHAPTER I Spectres

TO Don Hargreaves the squat buildings of Martian Metals were not a pleasant sight. Their crude, square shapes were coated with a layer of black dust, as was the surrounding landscape for about a mile in every direction.

They pained him with their distressful ugliness and filth after the smoothly rounded beauty of the ancient and long deserted Martian city nearby. Yet it was here that fabulous riches in rare metals were won for wealthy shareholders back on Earth, and where hundreds of toiling workers labored to earn enough to give their families a taste of the better things of life.

If those workers returned! For the accident rate was high. He had access to the figures and he knew, as few did, how very high that rate was. But every man that died meant one fewer to transport all those millions of miles back to their home planet, or to feed on the way. Death was profitable to Martian Metals.

It had been with extreme distaste that he had accepted the unwelcome assignment to escort heartless, unfeeling Elsa Thorwaldson about the ruins of the

ancient Martian city near the mines, and now, walking beside her space-suited figure, he resented his duty even more. Just a mention of the legend of Martian ghosts had made her laugh him to scorn. Even now she continued to titter into her helmet radio.

The sound of her laugh grated on his nerves. It seemed to him not at all good taste to laugh in the presence of the tragedy of the departed life of Mars.

She had, he reflected, something of the hard, mercenary outlook of her father, resident manager of the Martian Metals Company. He had spoken to her father about the hard conditions of the mines, and of the lack of safety precautions, and had been told abruptly that the high cost of transport from Earth to Mars made better things impossible. He had spoken, too, of what seemed to him to be the unwisdom of the new policy of employing so much low-grade labor from such places as Java, Burmah, Siam and Borneo. White men were so few here, and help was millions of miles away.

At this, also, both father and daughter scoffed.

It distressed him to find one so beautiful, so elegant as Elsa Thorwaldson to be so lacking in human feelings.

"You talk of ghosts," she said suddenly, "and yet you want me to go into this old city. I don't want to walk among a lot of graveyards."

"Shall we visit the mines instead?" he asked, somewhat stiffly.

"Yes, do. I've had enough of this."

HE led the way. To Elsa, still unaccustomed to Martian gravity, it was a difficult walk. The fur suits, helmets and air tanks weighed heavily, yet even with these loads she still felt oddly light in the feeble grip of Mars. Every step carried her about twice as far as she expected it to.

It was treacherous going. It was late in the afternoon, and shadows of inky blackness lay everywhere. At first it had been thrilling to feel with one's foot where there appeared to be nothing and find solid rock; but now she ignored the black spaces, treading firmly in them.

So that when she came to a real hole she put her foot squarely in it. Luckily Hargreaves, whose eyes were accustomed to the conditions, and who knew holes from shadows, was nearby and caught her. Not that the fall was likely to be dangerous, but there was always the possibility of cracking a face-plate and letting the air out.

They walked along a regular lane through the dust, where the vehicles ran, so as not to stir up the filthy dust with their feet.

Through the soles of their boots they could feel the steady "Thump, thump, thump!" of the explosions that drove the power-generating station. It was this vibration that loosened stones in the roofs of the mine passages, causing them to fall on the miners beneath. A silencer to damp down the vibrations could be quite easily constructed, yet Thorwaldson said it was not practicable.

The exhaust gas was like a black fog

round the power station, gradually spreading out and settling down to form more black dust, making a great round spot on Mars, a spot just visible in the telescopes of Earth.

"Isn't it repulsive-looking, after the smooth but strong beauty of the Martian city?" he said to the girl.

Her reply was unexpected.

"It's the best we can do. You ought to have been a Martian. You like Martian things so much more than you do the things of Earth. I like to see these works. They look homely, like so many places back in our own world that you despise so much. That weird city gives me the creeps."

"You think I ought to be a Martian?" he repeated.

"Well, nothing on Earth is good enough for you, is it? You grumble about everything. Workers are underpaid and overworked, according to you, machines are ugly, factories are ugly, towns are ugly. You expect too much. We do the best we can. Perhaps you would have been happier among the Martians. Perhaps they managed these things better than we do."

"I'll bet they did," he murmured, bitterly.

Then, remembering that she was his employer's daughter, he went on: "Even in these prosaic surroundings there are said to be ghosts. Ghostly Martians are said to haunt the mines."

"Ghosts in the mines?"

"Yes. Numbers of men claim to have seen them, or rather him, for it appears to be the same ghost popping up every time anybody goes into a certain tunnel."

In obvious disbelief she asked to hear more.

"When the men were boring this particular tunnel they came up against a wall of the dark green metal that the Martians used for building purposes.

When this wall was broken through the workers found themselves in a large round tunnel running at a sharp angle to their own and lined throughout with the same green metal."

"A Martian tunnel?"

"Yes. It was undoubtedly Martian work. A water main probably, when the city was populated. You can imagine how startled the men were to find themselves in this vast, dim place, a place where, to their excited imaginations, almost anything might occur."

"Did the ghost appear then?"

"He was standing about thirty feet away from them, with his dog."

"A Martian dog? What was it like?"

"That's the weak point in the story. Everybody agrees that the dog was there, but they all differ as to what it looked like. One says it was like a greyhound and as tall as its ghostly master. Another says it was similar to a bulldog and about the same size. Others cannot describe it at all, but say their eyes were on this ghostly Martian, so that they took little notice of the dog."

"What did the ghost do?" she demanded, impatiently.

"I haven't finished describing him yet. The men say he was dressed in pale blue clothes with a metal belt and fittings, and that from the clothes came a pale blue radiance that filled the tunnel with ghostly light. On his forehead was another light that directed its beam on the men and their boring machine."

"He appeared, they say, suddenly, without any sound or warning. It was as though he had been there all the while they were breaking in, and turned his lights on when he was ready to reveal himself."

"About the next stage in the story everybody is agreed. This ghostly Martian raised his long left arm, pointed at the men, and said to the ghostly dog by his side the one word, 'Seize!'"

"And then what?"

"They did not stop to see. They ran, leaving the boring machine behind."

"A pretty story," she admitted acidly, "but there's one flaw in it. You say they could see the Martian's face, so that presumably he had no voice-amplifier. How could they hear what he said?"

"In some of our deeper workings there is enough air for voices to be heard fairly well. The tunnels have acoustic properties, too, magnifying sound. If the Martian spoke loudly, and with his huge lungs I should imagine he could speak very loudly if he chose, the men would hear him all right. But there is a flaw in the story all the same. It's this. How could a Martian have known the English word, 'Seize'? I expect if we knew more we should find that he was actually saying some Martian word whose meaning we do not know."

He was interrupted by a gust of mocking laughter, the same laughter as had irritated him some while before.

"Why, upon my word! So you actually believe in this silly ghost? You really believe that a ghost of a dead Martian walks the tunnels?"

Within his helmet he blushed hotly.

"A large number of men have seen him. They all agree as to the details, too. I noticed particularly that they all said that the ghost raised his left arm, not his right. And it is since that date that Professor Winterton announced his opinion that the Martians were a left-handed race."

"Anybody can see the ghost any time they like, according to the miners. All one has to do is to walk into the haunted tunnel and go a little way along it. Every time anyone does that he appears, clothed in light, with his dog, and points at you, saying, 'Seize!' It is as though there was something sacred to the Martians in that tunnel, and as though he was a ghostly sentry keep-

ing guard over it, driving away any vandals who might disturb whatever it is."

"And has nobody had the courage to stay long enough for this dog to seize him?" Her tone was scornful.

"So far as is known, no."

"What do you mean, 'So far as is known'?"

"Professor Winterton announced his intention of investigating the ghost mystery, alone. Next day he disappeared, and has never been seen since. Several miners and other people have disappeared, too."

"Fanciful nonsense," she snorted. "I'm going to look into this ghost business myself. And you are going to take me."

"But you can't go down into the deep part of the mine!"

"Why not?"

"Your father would not approve. The dangers. Falling stones. You might be crushed."

"My father says these dangers you speak of are much exaggerated. You are afraid of the ghost. Cowardly custard! Come along, or I'll go alone, and you will get into trouble for leaving me."

He reflected that perhaps it would only be poetic justice on her father if her undeniably beautiful but self-willed body was crushed as so many fathers of families had been, down there in the dismal darkness.

CHAPTER II

The Haunted Tunnel

THE cage shot down the shaft, passing stopping-places where passages ran off, following the ore-bearing veins that ran in chance-arranged streaks through the igneous rock.

Unthinkably long ago there had been great upsurgings of deeper, molten rock breaking through the crust and forcing

itself into cracks in the higher layers here. Upon that fact the whole great organization of Martian Metals rested.*

After a long descent, they reached the bottom with a jolt.

It was possible to open their face-plates down here. The air was dense, and they could breathe in fair comfort. The density was about the same as one finds on the tops of high mountains on Earth. But they had to be careful, for the high oxygen content of the atmosphere was apt to bring on a delusive feeling of well-being, leading to over-exertion and collapse.

Elsa raised her face-plate. Her face, so revealed, was freshly colored, well rounded, and sparkling with health and vitality. The harsh glare of the artificial lights showed up her health and boundless self-confidence better than even sunlight did.

A wonderful woman, thought Donald.

Ore-bearing trucks clattered through the gloom, on wide caterpillar tracks. It had not been worth the expense to smooth the floors of the passages enough for wheels to run on them. Besides which the fallen slabs of rock made the way very rough. The heavy trucks clattered and lurched with a din that, even in the comparatively thin air, battered painfully on the eardrums: their single headlights glared ahead balefully, making him think of so many army tanks advancing to battle. The sudden crashes as they lurched over

* Here on Mars, probably due to the lesser gravity, many metals rare on Earth are found in veins and ores near the surface, and in the dead sea beds. Cerium, Praseodymium, Ithium, Ytterbium and many more. Some of these are essential to the manufacture of the powerful modern explosives and with the exhaustion of Earth's coal and oil resources these explosives have become the chief sources of power, forcing the prices of the rare metals to such high figures that it becomes profitable to send men all the way to Mars and to construct these great mining and refining works to exploit the planet's resources.—Author.

obstacles, magnified by the tunnel walls, sounded like the roar of exploding shells.

Walking was hard work on the rough floors, and they had a long way to go. Donald looked round for a truck to take them. He approached a knot of dark-skinned men who looked at him with furtive hatred.

"A passenger truck for Miss Thorwaldson and myself," he ordered, trying to sound imperative.

Nobody moved.

"We get truck when foreman he tells us," said one of the men, grinning maliciously. There seemed to be some hidden meaning to his words.

Donald thought again of how unwise it was to employ so many low-paid Asiatics in the mines. The whites were few here, and the sharp discipline they kept up rested in the end on nothing but bluff. These men ought to be working, not lounging against the wall in this manner.

He went into the checker's office.

"What's wrong here? I asked for a truck for myself and Miss Thorwaldson, and those fellows refused to get one."

The clerk looked from him to the lady.

"Miss Thorwaldson here? Is it safe?"

"She insisted on coming."

"Oh! Well, I don't know what's wrong with the men, but they have been unusually surly and ill-tempered all through the shift. We've been looking for the foreman, but we can't find him. And they say they won't work until he comes to tell them what to do. It is beginning to look as though an accident has happened to him."

Donald repeated his request for a truck in which to show Miss Thorwaldson round the mine.

The checker grimaced.

"Wants to look round the mine? I should have thought one glance would have been enough. I'll fix you up."

He rang bells. Presently a laborer appeared.

THEY followed the heavily muscled workman. Two Burmese stood in their way and were insolently slow in moving to let them pass. Hargreaves saw the knotted muscles and set jaw of the miner, and knew that only the presence of the lady had saved those two slight, dark-skinned men from being knocked down. He saw, also, the gleaming eyes of the other Asiatics, and their hands resting on what might have been knives or might have been firearms in their pockets, and was relieved when they got past without trouble.

The truck lurched and rattled away, its radio-beam "feeler" reaching out and picking up power from the central power-station at the top of the shaft. He thought of the terrible noise there must have been here when each truck ran on its own explosive engine. Now the power-beams attracted the power silently, reaching upward unerringly through miles of rock.

The tunnel walls were grey-green in the light of the headlamp, streaked with veins of many colors seldom seen in the rocks of Earth. Here and there a beautiful crystal gleamed at them in its stony setting.

"Are those diamonds in the walls?" she asked in his ear. "How lovely!"

"Those are not diamonds," he answered. "Those are mere worthless crystals. But diamonds are found here, and topaz and many precious stones. They form a valuable by-product of the mine. Only the biggest and most flawless are worth the cost of transporting back to Earth.

"Stringent precautions are taken to prevent the miners secreting them back.

Stones thrown away here may be worth a small fortune on Earth. For all our care some of the men get away with it. Extraordinary tricks they get up to smuggle diamonds. They even cut themselves and press diamonds into the wounds. But the X-ray examination usually finds them. One man swallowed a diamond so large that it lodged in his intestines and killed him."

The driver spoke, his powerful below carrying easily above the racket made by the vehicle in its blundering progress.

"Is there anywhere in particular that ye want to go? These tunnels are all pretty much alike. There ain't much to show ye."

"The lady wants to see tunnel 57."

The truck came to an abrupt halt. The sudden silence was startling.

"Did ye say tunnel 57?"

"Yes."

The powerful man looked scared. "Faith and begorra, ye can't go there."

"Why not?"

"Why not? But ye know why not, Mr. Hargreaves. Tunnel 57 is closed."

"But the lady wants to go there. She wants to see the ghost for herself."

"Oh, does she?" His color was slowly coming back. "Then she's got more pluck than I have. Ask her, does she know that several men have gone into tunnel 57 and never come back?"

But Elsa Thorwaldson only laughed, stridently.

"I'm not scared of those silly stories. Are you going to take us into the tunnel or not? What's the delay?"

Donald thought now that bravery of hers wasn't real, that in an emergency it wouldn't be so evident. She wasn't brave, she was bold.

The driver wiped the moisture from his forehead. It was warm in the mine.

"Faith, I'll take ye to the tunnel.

But not into it. Devil an inch will I go inside that place. Ye'll have to walk the little way that it is to where the ghost is said to appear."

TWENTY minutes of bumping journey brought them to the entrance of the mysterious passage. Elsa Thorwaldson got out.

"Here we are, Sir Launcelot. Are you coming? Or are you afraid, and must I raise this Martian spectre alone?"

He got down beside her.

"Don't you think you are running into needless danger?" he asked. "There is something in here that we do not understand. The men of Mars might have left traps for invaders in their tunnels, pitfalls and all that sort of thing. Those traps may still be working, in spite of the lapse of time. The apparition may be an automatic television camera that throws a warning picture on a prepared screen as a warning that the trap is there. And where men have vanished—"

"Other men are too cowardly to find out why," she concluded.

THE passage narrowed rapidly to the width of a swath cut by a single boring-machine. He pointed out the jagged edges of the dark-green metal that had been broken through.

"That is the lining of the Martian water-main, or whatever it is, that has been broken into. Beyond that we find ourselves in a tunnel much larger than this, round, and lined throughout with this same unknown alloy. Are you going in?"

For answer she leaped down the slight drop into the Martian tunnel. He followed.

Under their feet was a collection of stones and rubble that the miners had made in breaking through. Beyond the

heap the tunnel was smooth and shone green in the light of their lamps.

"Here we are, and no ghost to be seen," she said. "Let's take a walk."

The green walls echoed her words, which seemed to rustle away through the silent place, dying away at last in conspiratorial whispers.

Seeing that there was no turning her back, he went with her. He imagined that he had heard a heavy step not far away, such as a man ten foot tall might make. He also thought he caught a chinking and scraping as of metal on metal, but he said nothing to her about this.

They went perhaps a hundred yards. "Are you satisfied now?" he asked.

She grunted, not quite so sure of herself as she had been. This place was certainly eerie, with the solid blackness stretching before them, the echoing sound of their feet, and the odd gleams of light that came from unexpected angles in the walls, reflections of their own lamps, of course, but uncomfortably like watching eyes.

And then, abruptly, the darkness swept aside.

A pale blue light flooded the tunnel in front of them. And in the middle of the light stood a man, a man so tall that his head reached halfway to the roof of the big tunnel. His face was partly inhuman by reason of the great breadth of the nose and the size of the ears. Beside him was a vague, uncertain shape.

Slowly the giant raised his left arm.

"Seize!" commanded a deep, powerful voice.

They realized, with a shock, that the heap of rubble marking the way back into the mine was a long way off.

CHAPTER III

Mutiny

NOW that the crisis had come Donald Hargreaves felt icily calm. His

pulse seemed no faster, and his breath came no more quickly than it usually did in this rather thin air. He was proud of himself, and felt about six foot tall instead of his actual height of something under five foot six.*

He was aware that Elsa Thorwaldson had given a wail of terror and was clinging almost painfully to his arm. Her courage seemed to have evaporated. He supposed that his presence gave her a feeling of protection, and that she would sooner hold onto him than leave him to run for safety.

That, too, gave him a feeling of confidence.

For a moment or so he thought of picking her up and carrying her back, but he realized how absurd this would be, seeing that she weighed more than he. Their progress would be slow.

The ghostly Martian made no move. After speaking his one word he merely lowered his arm to his side once more and waited.

Donald's eyes were on the vague shape by his side. It was from this that he expected the danger to come if the creature, whatever it was, tried to carry out its master's orders and seize them.

It was a curious sort of creature, more suggestive of a sea-beast than of a creature that walked on land and breathed air. It had two round shells, rather like greatly enlarged oyster shells, and from between the edges of the shells stuck, or rather, hung out, a number of long tentacles with claws at the ends. It made him think, incongruously, of a clumsy eater consuming macaroni, with the ends hanging untidily out of his mouth.

The creature made no move. He had a feeling that as long as he stood quite still looking at it the beast would also

* Martian Metals preferred small men to big men, as they weighed less and ate less, so that it cost much less to transport them and provisions for them through space.—Author.

remain motionless. He thought of what he had read of the power of the human eye over dumb beasts. Perhaps it worked on Mars also, even on the ghosts of what took the place of dogs on Mars. He tried to hypnotize the beast with his eyes, so that it would remain exactly where it was, in spite of its master's order.

The plan certainly seemed to work. Apart from waving two of its tentacles as though enquiring about something it was as still as a statue.

But the ghostly Martian, in the aura of pale blue light that radiated from his clothes, was not still for long. Once again he raised his great left arm, and once again he gave the order, "Seize!"

Elsa screamed and ran.

Donald stayed where he was. Even if the queer beast leaped at him, as he thought every instant it must, he would stand between it and her. It must take the thing a little while to destroy him, and in that time she might escape.

But nothing happened.

He listened to her running steps. Now she was at the heap of fallen stones. She was scrambling over them, for he heard the stones rolling under her feet.

She was back in the mine. He drew a deeper breath, for now he felt, though he had no reason to think so, that she was safe.

The ghostly Martian was frowning at him as though impatient or puzzled. He spoke again, this time without pointing. "Go!"

AND at this word a great amazement and relief came over Donald Hargreaves. All his tension drained away, and he felt comfortable and at ease once more.

For he knew now that this giant was not a ghost. He was living flesh and blood. And he was giving a quite definite and understandable order. He was

telling him to go back where he came from. Donald Hargreaves, it seemed, was not wanted in the Martian tunnel.

He did not stop to wonder how this could be, but thought only about the immediate circumstances.

The Martian was obviously a powerful man, and there was also the strange creature by his side to be considered. Donald had no weapon of any sort to defend himself with if either of them should become violent. If this Martian said, "Go!" then plainly it was his wisest policy to do as he was told before anything unpleasant happened.

But he was not sure whether Elsa had reached safety yet. A Martian who was flesh and blood, and not an astral being from the realm of dreams, might follow an unprotected female into the mines. He still felt that it was his duty to guard her retreat.

He played for time.

"Do you want me to go? Don't you encourage visitors to this subterranean abode of yours?" he asked, with what he meant to be a pleasant smile.

The Martian spoke two more words. "No savvy," he said.

The words came awkwardly, with a queer intonation. And at those words something else became clear to Donald. He understood how the Martian had learned to speak a few words of English. By some means, perhaps concealed microphones and a sort of telescope that could see through rocks, he had in some way been watching and listening to the miners. Certain words were usually followed by certain actions, and thus he would learn the meaning of those words. When one said, "Go!" for instance, he would notice that the one spoken to usually went away: after "No savvy" the original remark was usually repeated. The miners always said, "No savvy" when there was anything they did not understand. And, "Seize," why,

of course, what the giant was trying to say was, "Cease!" meaning cease work, or stop. The last foreman in the mines had always said that when telling the men to finish a job, never, "Knock off!" or, "That'll do," as the new man did.

"Cease." Why, it was perfectly clear now. He meant, "Stop exploring this tunnel."

"Must I go?" he asked.

"Yess," said the Martian, sibilantly. "You musst go. Not safe here. Danger. Go."

"Thanks for warning me," said Donald, thinking that Elsa must by now be out of harm's way. Being uneasy about turning his unprotected back upon the weird being whose clawed tentacles hung so untidily out of its bivalve shell, he walked backward to the mine, leaving the light-clothed Martian alone in the tunnel his ancestors had made, where visitors from another world were so inhospitably received.

WITHOUT haste, he made his way along tunnel 57. He hoped Elsa had not tripped on this rough floor and fallen and hurt herself in her headlong flight.

What a story he would have to tell! And how mistaken the scientists all were! They all thought the Martians were a completely vanished race, long ago dead, and here they were, or at least one of them was, living underground like trogo—trogo—what was the word?—troglodytes.

And with domestic animals like—What could he say they were like? Like hermit crabs. Yes, that was the nearest he could get to it. Like hermit crabs in oyster shells, but about as large as a full grown man.

Professor Winterton would be surprised when he heard. But Professor Winterton was gone. What had happened to Professor Winterton, he won-

dered, suddenly. Could he have met the Martian and ignored his warning to go back? And had one of the dangers the Martian spoke of got him?

With a prickly sensation at the back of his neck he wondered if his own escape had been narrower than he thought it to be.

He heard running steps. Was it the Martian? Or his crustacean companion?

No, it was somebody coming the other way. A miner. No, it was Elsa. What could have made her run this way, toward the very danger she had fled? He must warn her again about exerting herself so much in the thin but oxygen-laden air. It was asking for trouble.

Elsa saw him, and screamed in terror. "Donald! Donald!"

Something had frightened her very badly, something even worse than a ghost. Always before she had called him Hargreaves. He felt like a father comforting a terrified child.

"Oh, Donald, something awful has happened. The Irishman is dead."

"The Irishman?"

"The big miner who brought us here in the truck. He is lying dead beside his machine in a pool of blood. The power is off, and the truck will not move. Nor will the light go on. And I heard men shouting in the distance, excited shouts, and shooting."

He stood quite still, letting facts sink into his brain. A dead man—shouting and firing. That meant that the Asiatics among the workmen had mutined. Exactly what he had feared for some time.

"Stay here," he told her. "I'll go and see."

"And leave me here?"

She was too scared to be left alone.

They went together to the end of the passage. The truck stood in front of the entrance, the dead driver nearby where

he had apparently been smoking a cigarette. A huge hole had been blown in his chest by an explosive bullet.

Clearly, nothing could be done for him.

His brain still reeling from the shock of the tragedy, he tried to pull himself together and think calmly of what was the best thing to do. How were they to get back to the main shaft that led to the surface? The passages and tunnels of the mine were a hopeless maze to him. Before they had gone far without a guide they would be completely lost. The only thing was to stay where they were until help came. But would help come? How long would they have to wait? Nobody but the dead driver knew where they were. Meanwhile their friends were probably needing help, but he was unable to get to them to help them.

"Do I hear men's voices?" the girl beside him asked nervously.

He listened.

Yes, there were voices, coming toward them. A number of men speaking rapidly in some language that was strange to him.

Elsa ran into the haunted tunnel.

A moment or so later four men appeared round a bend in the walls. They were Asiatics. As soon as they saw him they fired, the explosive bullet striking the wall and bringing down a shower of stones.

He ran into the tunnel where Elsa hid. They would be afraid to follow them into its haunted reaches, he reasoned.

And so it proved. The Asiatics stopped at the entrance and argued. Donald and Elsa, hidden behind a bend in the walls, could hear them plainly.

They seemed to reach a decision. There came a series of curious noises, then a loud crash.

"What's that?" demanded Elsa.

"How should I know? It sounds as though they have overturned the truck."

They were not left long in doubt. A voice came shouting along the tunnel.

"Listen! Do you hear me, you skulking white man? You've got away from us for a time, but you'll stay in there until your bones rot or the ghost gets you. We've turned the truck over on its side, so that it completely blocks your way out. And now we are piling heavy stones on it so that a dozen men could not move it from your side. Good-bye, and pleasant dreams! Most of your friends are dead, and you won't be long in joining them!"

After a long wait Donald went to the entrance to see what they had done. The truck was lying on its side, completely blocking the passage. It was hopeless to think of getting out.

"Oh, what can we do?" moaned Elsa feebly.

Donald's brain had been working rapidly. He had resolved on a plan, a desperate plan but the only possible one so far as he could see.

"This tunnel, Miss Hargreaves, has two ends, this end and the end that leads into the Martian tunnel where we met the giant. In any other passage of the mine we might be trapped; here we are not. The other end is open. We must go the other way."

"Oh! Do you mean to go back to where we saw that awful ghost? I can't do that."

"Why not, Miss Thorwaldson? It is the only way. Nobody knows we are here except the dead men and those who shut us in here. If things were normal I doubt if anybody would think to look for us here, since we told nobody where we were going. And with these Asiatics walking about shooting everybody it seems pretty obvious that no search party will come for us for a long while.

Even if the mutiny was crushed everybody's hands would be full. If we wait we shall be left here a lot longer than we can hold out.

"Now there is just the possibility that there may be a way to the surface through the Martian tunnel. Did you notice how fresh the air was inside that tunnel? It is fairly certain in my mind that it communicates with the surface somewhere. In my opinion it is an old water-main, and if so it almost certainly goes to the city, and we should be able to get out through the city. I know it is very deep for a water-main, but they probably had to go deep for their water when the seas dried up.

"Besides, we cannot possibly stay here long: our lights will not last for more than an hour or so, and we do not want to be feeling our way about in darkness. And then again your father and the others probably need our help: it is our duty to get out to them if we possibly can. As for the ghost: perhaps we can dodge him."

After much persuasion, Elsa Thorwaldson was at last convinced that he was right, and that his plan was the only possible one for them.

They went back along the tunnel once more. The first time she had gone boldly and he had hung back uncertainly: now he went ahead with firm step, and she came hesitatingly behind.

CHAPTER IV

A Strange Journey

DONALD HARGREAVES was certain in his own mind that the tunnel was originally a water-main supplying the ancient city with water from some deep reservoir. If so, it was almost certain to run to the City of the Desert without branches. He tried to imagine what a water-works would be like on an almost airless planet. Pumps

would be of little use with no air-pressure to work them: he imagined a large underground reservoir out of which water was dipped up in large buckets. He hoped there would be steps or a ladder or some means whereby they could climb out of the reservoir.

But those troubles were a long way ahead. The immediate difficulty was to find their way to the city, and to avoid the giant Martian who guarded the tunnel. His chief fear was that the tunnel might prove not to be straight but to wind and branch in a series of wandering caverns in which they might become lost. Or to have caved in, despite its tough metal lining.

He had a great fear that their lights would not last, and that presently they would find themselves wandering hopelessly in total darkness. He urged Elsa to walk rapidly.

Was it possible to evade the Martian guardian? Though he had confidently declared that they could, at the back of his mind he did not believe it. He felt oddly certain that the giant would appear, exactly as he had done every time before.

Which, indeed, he did.

His procedure was exactly the same as before. One moment there was perfect darkness ahead of them: the next moment the tunnel was flooded with light, and in the middle of the light stood the ten-foot giant, the weird combination of sea-beast and land-creature again beside him.

Elsa gasped.

This time the giant did not raise his arm or say, "Cease!" What he said was, "You again?"

Elsa seemed to calm herself, and to forget her fear in bewilderment.

Donald found it difficult to know what to say. How could he explain to this strange being that their own kind had turned on them, and that as a con-

sequence there was no safety for them among their own people? The giant was obviously but little acquainted with the English language. Also, it was impossible to judge how he would take the news.

"Yes, us again," he said, feeling rather foolish.

"I said, 'Go!'" said the giant, speaking with difficulty but calmly. "Don't you savvy? Go. Danger here."

Elsa beside him was breathless with amazement at this conversation with a ghost.

"Danger *there*," answered Donald, pointing back with his arm. "Can't go."

"No savvy," repeated the giant obstinately. "Danger here. Go."

"Can't go," repeated Donald, agitatedly. "Tunnel blocked. Can't get back."

To his surprise the giant understood this at once. Apparently he had often heard miners talking of falls from the roofs and obstructions of tunnels.

"Tunnel blocked?" he asked. "Roof fall? Obstruction?"

Donald nodded. Now they were getting somewhere.

"Good," said the Martian. "Roof fall. Obstruct tunnel. You can't go. I savvy. I remove obstruction. I clear tunnel. Then you go."

He flexed a mighty arm. Donald understood what he was offering to do: to walk into tunnel 57, remove the stones that he understood were in the way, and leave them free to return to their own kind.

It was a generous offer. Plainly the Martian was willing to help them to a certain extent. Those huge arms and mighty torso obviously had the strength of many men, in spite of the slender hips and legs. But even so he would not be strong enough to move the heavy truck, weighted as it was with stones. And even if he did their problems would

not be solved.

"Oh, thanks awfully. That's good of you. But you couldn't do it. Obstruction too big. Stones too heavy. You could not move them."

"I get power," was the reply. "I get machines. Our machines can move anything. Bore another tunnel if necessary."

When the Martian was talking about mining he could be almost fluent. Donald decided to try to tell this unexpectedly friendly giant all their troubles.

"Thanks a whole heap. But we can't go out. Bad men kill. They shoot. Danger."

"No savvy," was the response.

Having said which, the Martian proceeded to behave in a curious manner. He raised his arm, his right arm, to his face, and proceeded to make a long, curious noise at it, whistling, grunting and hooting for about a minute without stopping.*

And, faintly, Don could hear the arm replying. What was happening was that the giant was carrying on a telephonic conversation with another of his kind by means of some instrument on his arm.

"I savvy," said the giant at last, when he lowered his arm. "Danger. Men shoot. Kill."

He raised an arm, pointed one finger as though it was a revolver. "Crack!" he said. And then, "Boom!"

It was an exact imitation of the sound of shooting, followed by the roar of an explosive bullet.

"I savvy. Follow me."

Something touched Donald's leg, and he jumped convulsively. The hermit-

* Due no doubt to the different structure of their brains from ours, Martians can talk and listen to each other at the same time. They do not speak, wait for a reply and then speak again. They go straight on without a pause, two or three or even four of them at the same time keeping up a continuous stream of sound.—Author.

crab-dog, forgotten all this while, had crawled up to him without being noticed, and was feeling inquisitively at the fur that covered his legs. It was exactly like being sniffed at by a friendly dog.

Soon a glass ball came rolling along the tunnel, a hollow sphere some fifteen feet in diameter inside which a square compartment with seats for passengers hung on an axle, keeping always the right way up.

The Martian beckoned to them to get in. After a little time spent in overcoming Elsa's fears and persuading her to trust herself in the curious vehicle, they all climbed in with the help of the Martian. The seats were much too big for Elsa and himself, and their feet dangled far above the floor. The strange creature nestled contentedly by its master's feet.

THE sphere set off, rolling through the green-lined tunnel with rapidly mounting speed. Donald found himself wondering whether there were many more such round vehicles running through these tunnels, and how collisions were avoided. There was no room for two such spheres to pass each other, and they raced round bends at great speed. He decided that a system of one-way traffic must be the rule.

They turned off at many forks, until it would have been impossible for them to find their way back alone. He felt glad they had not been left to wander these confusing tunnels by themselves, for they would have been lost in the maze very quickly, to say nothing of the chance of being crushed by a speeding sphere.

Now and again the giant Martian would raise his right arm in front of him and make a long series of noises at it without stopping for breath. And now Don plainly heard the instrument on

the arm replying in a similar manner. The driver was conversing with another of his kind away somewhere in the tunnels.

At last the sphere ran off the road into a short but wide side tunnel where a number of other such spheres stood idle.

The driver got out, and they jumped down, too.

They went through a hole into a large, green-lined compartment where three other giants similar to the one who had driven them here sat on seats and looked at them with a sort of sadness but without surprise.

No light came from the pale-blue clothes of these Martians, there were no lamps, but the whole of the flat white ceiling glowed luminously, filling the place with light. Their guide must have pressed a switch or something on his person, for the light shining from his own clothing went out.

A babble of noise broke out, all four Martians talking rapidly in their non-stop, breathless manner, yet each paying full attention to the others. Donald knew that his companion and himself were being thoroughly discussed.

Presently the noise stopped save for an occasional remark. One Martian went to an instrument on the wall and began playing with wires which he plugged into what looked like a complicated telephone keyboard. He then tapped at the keys of something rather like a typewriter keyboard, except that there were hundreds of keys.

The Martians looked at them expectantly. Nothing seemed to happen.

"See," said their guide, pointing to a green sphere about eighteen inches in diameter resting on a short pedestal. But though they looked very carefully there was nothing to see.

"Sorry," said the Martian at the keyboard. "My mistake. Your eye and

ear different to ours. Wave length not right."

AND then, suddenly without warning, Professor Winterton appeared apparently inside the green sphere, sitting on a seat and frowning.

CHAPTER V

Professor Winterton

"IS that you, Professor?" asked Donald, nervously.

"Why, of course it's me," answered the white-haired scientist, with a smile. "Can't you see it's me? Actually, of course, I am miles away from you, down in the bowels of the planet, and you are talking to my image, or projection, just as I am talking to yours."

"Are you all right? How did you get there? Are you there of your own free will, or are you held captive?"

"I am here of my own free will, or at least I came here of my own free will. I could not go back to where you are now. But that's not the fault of the Martians. It's due to the composition of the air down here. There is a lot of krypton in it. That krypton is gradually dissolved into the blood if one stays here for long: it does no harm so long as one remains here, but if I tried to return to the surface or to Earth the krypton would form into bubbles in my blood, stopping my arteries and causing death.* Once a man comes here

there is no return, Hargreaves. That is why I can never go back to Earth.

"Sometimes I wish I could return; sometimes I feel I would like to see again the blue sky, the stars and the sun and moon as I saw them from Earth, for though I can see the sky and the sun and stars in the television any time I choose (they've got wonderful telescopes here, by the way) they look very different from Mars.

"But on the whole I think it was worth it, coming here. There is such a wonderful lot to be learned. Such a lot of astronomical knowledge, knowledge of other worlds. I never dreamed it was possible. I only wish there was a first-class physicist here, and a biologist and a chemist. They'd be staggered at what a lot there is to be learned.

"I might add that the natives are troubled with the krypton difficulty also, although not so much as we people from Earth. Their blood does not part with the krypton so readily, but even they have to be careful."

"Professor!" It was Elsa Thorwaldson's urgent voice. "We are in danger. My father is in danger, perhaps dead. Some revolutionaries are making trouble in the mine. They are shooting everybody. Can you help us?"

The Professor's delicately moulded face looked troubled.

"Don't distress yourself about that, Miss Thorwaldson. We know all about it. A number of Martians and myself were watching in the television machines through nearly all the trouble."

"Is it over yet? Is my father safe? What's happened?" demanded the girl, impatiently.

"Don't distress yourself, young lady. Your father is unharmed at the moment, but he is confined to the big house, as are a lot of other people. There are really very few dead: the revolt was a complete surprise, so complete that

* This is similar to the "bends" which divers get if they come up out of the water too quickly. Nitrogen is dissolved into the blood under pressure, and when the pressure is removed suddenly it is given up again, forming bubbles. The Krypton on Mars behaves in the same way. Krypton is a gaseous element (also found in Earth's atmosphere, in a minute proportion of one part in twenty million) and appears to be very similar to argon, helium, etc. Its molecules are made up of single atoms, and its atomic weight is 82.9. Krypton samples have been liquefied and even solidified. The solid melted at -169°C . and the liquid boiled at -152°C . Its critical temperature (i. e., the highest temperature at which it can be liquefied) is -62.5°C .—Ed.

there was practically no resistance, and the mutineers gained control of everything that mattered with practically no fighting. Most of the white men are prisoners. And, by the way, this is not a revolt by dissatisfied workmen or anything like that: it is a planned attack by the Asiatics on the white men, and seems to have been carried through on secret orders from the Asiatic Federation.

"The Federation of Asiatic peoples wants control of the mines so as to corner the world's supply of explosives and war-materials: they want to build up the armaments of Asia, to make Asia strong and end their exploitation by the whites. That is how they put it, which sounds as though an outbreak of war between white and yellow men will be the final outcome of this," he concluded, sadly.

"But what are we going to do about it?" cried Elsa.

"Do? We must be patient, young lady. We cannot give orders to the Martians. Until they have considered the matter and decided on their attitude we must wait while the Supreme Council makes up its mind as to what can or cannot be done. Remember, young lady, this quarrel is no concern of Mars. They have no reason to favor either white or yellow man if the two sections of mankind should fight. They understood that a cowardly attack was being made on the white people here, and also I have made it clear to them that the Asiatics plan a disastrous war against the white nations.

"I think, in fact I know, that they are humanitarian enough to be pained by the idea of great numbers of people being slaughtered. Even an alien people on a planet many millions of miles away; but if they decide that they cannot interfere, well, we shall just have to put up with it, however painful the

idea may be to us."

"And if they decide to help us?" demanded Elsa, still more eagerly, "what can they do?"

The Professor sighed.

"I understand and appreciate your anxiety for your father, but really, how can you expect me to know that? I haven't been here so awfully long, you know. My tongue is very slow and clumsy at that awfully difficult language of theirs, and they gabble it so rapidly. I really know very little about them as yet. They are a very peaceful people. I can't see them fighting the Asiatics, who comprise about two-thirds of mankind, over a quarrel that is not theirs. All the justice in this question is not on the side of the whites, and they know it." These last remarks the Professor made half to himself.

Elsa looked angry. Her personal fears of the Martians were forgotten, and she seemed to find it hard to realize that here, for once, she could not give orders.

"TELL me about the Martians," said Donald quietly. "How do they live?"

The Professor brightened.

"Just what I was about to do. The inside of Mars is astonishing, Hargreaves. It is full of holes like one great sponge. I understand now why the specific gravity of Mars is so much less than that of Earth.

"You know, Donald, that as the molten, or semi-molten, interior of a planet cools it shrinks. Some geologists think that earthquakes and mountain ranges are caused by that process. But in time the crust of the globe becomes so thick and strong that it refuses to cave in. Then tremendous holes are formed underground by the retreating magma. The oceans drain away to fill the great empty spaces. That is what

happened on Mars, and on the Moon. As the holes become bigger and more numerous air, too, is sucked into the holes, until at last the whole surface of the planet or whatever it is becomes barren, airless and lifeless. No doubt a similar fate is in store for our own beautiful Earth, in some far-off age."

It took a little while for this stupendous new conception to sink into Donald's mind.

"Then the air and water do not seep away gradually into space?"

"No. It disappears underground. These deeper strata are amazingly strong and solid when they cool. There are caverns here many hundreds of miles in extent. I'll show you some."

The image of the Professor vanished, to be replaced by vast views of weird underground landscapes. There were great oceans, waveless and smooth as polished glass, white clouds drifting against lofty roofs, fields of blue grass and long-legged, big-chested cattle. There were great cities built of what seemed to be colored glass, vehicles of many strange designs and ships that ploughed the waters of smooth oceans and rivers.

All was lit by a pale, phosphorescent glow that came from the rocks themselves, and the homes and persons of men were lit by the same pale blue glow that shone from the ceiling of the rocky room they sat in, the cold light so long unsuccessfully sought by scientists and industrialists of Earth.

"Let me tell you the story of Mars, briefly," went on the Professor's voice, while they watched these astonishing views. "Those were sad days on Mars when the great oceans began to shrink. The process began quite suddenly, when some point of natural equilibrium was past, no doubt. The Martians can name the very year when it started, when the average level of the oceans

dropped by an eighth of an inch, and nobody was able to account for it. Next year it was just over a quarter of an inch, then an eighth again, and half an inch the following year.

"There were some tremendous earthquakes and tidal waves, due to the waters meeting highly heated strata and turning into steam.

"Century after century it went on, the slow, inexorable drying-up of the planet, and none of their scientists was able to explain it. The waters shrank and shrank. They extended their harbors and docks to lower levels, following the retreating waters. They built vast systems of pumping works and canals to water their fertile lands, but gradually the dwindling seas beat all their efforts. Nearly all Mars became barren desert.

"It puzzled them. The seas were not evaporating for the salt content did not increase. The waters were soaking away somewhere, but they did not know where.

"It seemed that Martian mankind was doomed.

"The great city near where you now are was for a long time thought to be the very last stand of human life on Mars. Their world, that had so long befriended them, had become a great thirsty sponge, sucking away their means of life. It had become hostile.

"Then these great caverns were found, and they knew where the water had gone. They found it was possible to grow food and rear cattle in these caverns, and the human race of Mars took on a new lease of life. Slowly the air followed the waters, and mankind and all the life of Mars followed the oceans, the air and the food plants underground into the caverns, leaving the surface of a once fertile planet barren and lifeless, staring blankly up at the stars. Except for some of the

smaller creatures and minor plants.

"There was some trouble at the finish, some fighting and a terrible pestilence. It was difficult to establish human life in completely subterranean conditions. But in time science and the determination of the race to live won. After great hardships they adapted themselves successfully to the new order of affairs. They could not live in the open now, even if the air came back. Sunlight would blind them."

"And you, Professor, are you happy?"

"Oh, I'm all right. Perfectly all right. There are eight of us here. We are all quite contented. They look after us, and we are much better off than we'd be on Earth. You'd be better off here than back on Earth, Donald. Earth has nothing to offer you but a low-paid job, insecurity and a poor home: Mars offers everything. You are a young man, and you'd find the Martian women very attractive, when you got used to their size and a certain elasticity of features. And games, pictures, music.

"I mention this because the choice will in all likelihood be put before you as it was put before me: to return to Earth or to remain here. Or possibly you will have no option at all. Possibly you have already absorbed so much krypton into your systems that it will be impossible for you to go back."

"But the mutineers, the Asiatics," exclaimed Elsa.

"We must await the decision of the Council."

CHAPTER VI

The Promise

AS Professor Winterton went on with his description gradually the view became clear to Donald. He understood how many millions of tall Martians lived underground, hidden from

the prying telescopes of Earth, and that, bottled up as they were, they were quite content.

It seemed to him that if he lived in that way for long he would find being so shut up intolerable; but no such idea seemed to bother the Martians or the small group of Earthmen who had gone there voluntarily. Possibly in those vaster caverns, with white clouds floating high above one, one did not feel shut up at all. He could not quite get his mind used to the idea.

The professor spoke, too, of tremendous, unforeseen falls of great masses of rock from the roofs. Of destructive tidal waves when such falls occurred over the seas. Of earthquakes, and sudden gushes of flame or suffocating gas from cracks in the floors. Of great snakes and nightmare monsters that rushed out of the dark labyrinths of small, unexplored caverns. Life in the interior of Mars was apparently much more exciting than on the surface of Earth.

All the while the Professor was talking the four Martians sat watching and making not a sound. Elsa yawned from time to time, and shifted uneasily. She was bored. All she wanted was to know what was going to be done about the conspirators, and about getting her back to her father. The Martian women, she thought, looked dowdy. There was not the daring variety about the color and form of their clothing that she liked to see. Instead of beautifully-dressed people living in dull, drab homes, here were simply-dressed people living in beautiful homes. It was as though houses mattered more than persons. She did not like it.

Food was brought to them, ordinary-looking food, but queerly flavored.

"Switching off now," announced the Professor. "We've had a pleasant chat and I'm tired. Let my people know I'm

all right if you ever go back. I'll ring you up as soon as there is any news."

Elsa snorted.

"What a man! It sounded just as though he was trying to persuade us to live the rest of our lives in these burrows, like moles."

"It might not be so bad," he murmured, thinking of slums and unemployed queues.

She snorted again, and sat silent, trying to show her disgust. Hargreaves let her show it.

Presently she said, "Now listen, Hargreaves. The Professor said he was going to ring us up again on this queer telephone and television thing. Next time you mustn't allow him to do all the talking. Explain to him that we've got to do something about the Asiatics. The rebels can't be allowed to steal our mine like this. I've got to get back, too."

"Why should I?" he asked, not liking her abrupt orders.

"Why? Do you ask me why? When my father is your employer, providing your food and keep?"

"Perhaps I may be independent of your father from now on."

"What do you mean?"

"Did you hear the Professor say that we would be allowed to remain in Mars if we chose? If we stay in Mars, both of us, we need not trouble about your father any more."

"What are you talking about? I shall refuse to stay on Mars. I shall insist that we return, both of us."

But her confidence was fading.

"You can insist, you can order," he said. "But remember this: to the Martians we are not the boss' daughter and an employee. We are simply a man and a woman. We go or we stay, together. I am the man, and the Professor made it clear that it is I who will be expected to make the decisions. If I say we go,

then, if it is possible, we go. If I decide to stay, we stay."

He said it only to tease her. He knew of no reason why Elsa Thorwaldson could not return, even if he stayed. But to her it seemed quite possible. She had paid but little attention to the Professor's words. She could not understand why the women of Mars dressed with so little display if theirs was not a down-trodden position.

Her mind worked rapidly.

"You want to stay on Mars with me as your woman?"

Donald was startled, and blushed.

"I hadn't thought of that."

Which was quite true, but to her his blush was proof. She had seen his admiration of her robust beauty in his eyes many times.

She smiled at him. He was not accustomed to women, and this broad, super-charming smile took his breath away. He was not so much dazzled as startled.

In an artificially-lighted dance hall, among painted faces (male and female), it would have been perfect. Here in a cavern on Mars, under a blue-shining ceiling with a tall Martian looking on (three had gone out on some mysterious errand), it looked excessive.

"Confess!" she invited him. "You were thinking of it. You do find me attractive."

He had a sense of drowning. Then she wanted him to say yes.

"Nobody can deny your beauty, Miss Thorwaldson," he said.

She thought him very stiff. Actually, he was frightened.

"You are so small," she said, "so pale and delicate-looking. I've often thought I'd like to mother you."

He looked uncomfortable.

"At least, I thought so until last night," she declared. "Then you were so brave and strong. Altogether differ-

ent from what I expected. When you stayed so bravely in that tunnel, and faced the ghost that everybody else feared."

"Was I?"

"Oh, you were wonderful!"

Her wavy black hair, her lively brown eyes, her red cheeks and lips, were irresistible. He kissed her. Though she was holding herself out to be kissed as plainly as she could, yet he thought he was being very daring.

"I love you!" he blurted out, throwing his arms round her.

"My darling," she answered.

And neither of them took the least notice of the tall Martian sitting on his seat, staring past them, taking not the least interest in either of them or in their antics. He had been so still and silent that they had come to regard him as part of the furniture of the room.

"SEE," said the Martian suddenly, his mobile features directing their attention to the crystal ball in the middle of the floor, while his arms played rapidly over his keyboards and wheels.

They parted just in time. Professor Winterton's image was back again, staring at them.

"Ah, still there, I see? There's been a lot of fuss and excitement over you down here. Ringing up people, sending messages, getting the views of important persons who had gone on holidays and were difficult to trace, oh, such a confusion! There hasn't been so much excitement on Mars since the Queen dismissed her husband and installed an air-pilot as King in his place.

"But at last we traced nearly everybody who mattered, and all those people who would have been offended if they had not been consulted. *Such* a lot of them! Phew!

"Ah! Here comes the last report. From the King and Queen. These mes-

sages come to me because you would not understand them.

"Her Majesty says, 'I think the ducky little boy must stay on Mars. Didn't he look nice and shy when she was kissing him? He must come to my court.'

"His Majesty says, 'Send him back at once!'

"Their Majesties are now discussing the matter with some excitement, and there seems to be little chance of their arriving at any agreed decision."

Donald broke in.

"I say, have they been watching us?"

"All Mars has been watching you. They had to see you in order to make up their minds. But I shouldn't let that worry you: kissing is unknown on Mars. When the natives want to express affection they bite each other's noses, and rub each other's foreheads and cheeks with their noses. It is the nose and not the lips that expresses affection with them. They would not understand a kiss, unless they guessed its meaning by a sort of intuition, as Her Majesty seems to have done."

Elsa was not in the least embarrassed.

"What's going to be done about the Asiatics?"

"Let me explain one thing at a time. You can go or you can stay, just as you choose. The scientists say there will not be enough krypton in your blood yet to do any harm. So you can forget about that problem: that won't stop you."

"Could one of us go and the other stay?" asked Elsa.

"Certainly, but I thought you would want to be together."

"And what about the Asiatics? What are they going to do about those brigands and murderers?"

"I warned you that the rulers of Mars would not be likely to interfere in a quarrel between Earthmen. And that

is what they have decided. This fighting is no concern of Mars. Mars cannot intervene."

"But something's got to be done. Something *must* be done."

"I have explained carefully that these people are criminals who have made an unprovoked attack on peaceful people. They are prepared to arm you if you care to try an attack on these men yourselves, and to allow you the help of one of their domestic fighting animals, a zekolo, which they keep to protect them from snakes. But more than that they will not do. They will do nothing themselves."

"How are we to get back?" asked Donald. "We can't go through the mine. We'd walk straight into a trap. And if the power is off we couldn't get up the shaft."

"They've thought of that. You would not go through the mine. They would take you along the underground passages to their city, and show you the way out. But you can't go yet. It is night time outside, and in the Martian night you would freeze to death if you tried to cross the open space between city and mine. You have several hours to wait."

"Wait a minute," said Donald. He saw that he would have to make a single-handed attack on several hundred men, and he was not sure that the idea attracted him. "Give me time to think it over. We have several hours to sunrise. Give me time to make up my mind and tell you later what I mean to do."

"Yes, that's all right. I'll make arrangements to have you rung up later, about dawn."

The projection vanished.

Elsa looked at Donald with an expression he could not understand.

"We are tired. We must rest," she said to the Martian.

"I savvy." He guided them to sleep-

ing quarters where he left the couple to their own devices.

"**W**ON'T you do it, for my sake?" she asked, when they were alone.

"You were so brave in the mine, facing the giant that everybody else ran from. You won't spoil the picture I made of you then, will you? You won't shirk your duty now, my hero?"

"What chance would I have, against hundreds?"

"Are you afraid of the danger?"

"Yes, I am. Why pretend I'm not, when I'm certain to be killed? But I'll try it. I'll do what you say is my duty, on one condition."

"What is your condition?" she asked softly with a shy smile.

"You know how hard the lives of the miners are? What a lot of accidents there are? If I succeed I want better conditions in the mines, shorter working days and safety measures."

She had expected something quite different.

"But that would absorb all the profits. Martian Metals would have to close down."

"It would not. The company would still be able to pay ten per cent. If it couldn't, production would have to be cut down to force up prices. It would only mean less explosives for armaments."

"Listen to me. The Professor says that your father is confined to the big house. That means he is still on the telephone. I can go a little way into the mine and send a message to him, if the wires are not cut. I'll tell him of the attempt that I propose to make, and of my conditions, should I be successful. And in case anyone should be listening I'll speak in French. He knows that language fairly well, and the Asiatics are hardly likely to understand."

"Oh, you wouldn't," she pleaded.

"You don't know what it would mean. He'd lose his position. The shareholders would turn him out of control."

"He'd still be wealthy, if they did."

She put her arms around him.

"Donald, my darling! You won't insist on these conditions. You don't know what they mean. Come to me and promise me you'll forget them."

He knew little about women. Intoxicated by her powerful charms, his reason swept away.

He took her in his arms, and gave the promise she asked for, feeling like a traitor as he did so.

But tomorrow he was going to be killed. He was quite certain he was going to be killed. What did anything matter except that he was going to die?

CHAPTER VII

The Rescue

A WHISTLING sounded outside the round door.

"What is it?" asked Donald, half aroused.

"Dawn."

Donald sat up. He was sleepy still. He had had only a little light sleep, and did not feel in the least like heroic deeds. What he wanted was more rest.

But he had promised to go through with it.

He woke Elsa, who was bleary-eyed and not nearly so dazzling as she had appeared before.

"Morning," he said. "We have to get up."

They went into the other room, where three Martians waited. He wondered if they ever slept.

Without a word they adjusted the plugs and the keyboard. The projection of Professor Winterton appeared, in a long blue gown.

"What have you decided, Donald?"

"I am going back to see what I can

do to help the others."

"Good boy. I knew you would. We'd come and help you, but we can't because of the krypton in our blood. We would not be allowed to, either. But our best wishes go with you."

"Thanks."

"It's a dangerous job you are undertaking, but the Martian nerve-ray producer is an excellent weapon. It has unlimited range, and can be set, by turning a handle, to sweep a wide area or to focus and so carry a very long way. There is a switch: press it to the right and it produces unconsciousness, press it to the left and it kills. It produces chemical reactions in nerves that stops them working. You will be given a pair of special glasses, too, through which you can see the ray shining out of the box. That's a great help in aiming.

"And the zekolo. That's one of the shell-wearing creatures that follow the Martians about like dogs. Their shells are so hard as to be almost impossible to damage, even with explosive bullets. If their tentacles are shot away they simply grow more in a few days.

"They understand a few orders in Martian words. If you say, 'Grahbo!' to them they will rush upon and kill whoever you point out. Say, 'Grahlee!' and they simply knock your enemy down and disarm him. Now repeat those instructions."

Donald repeated the information.

"That's right. Better write it down to memorize."

Donald did, and the Professor checked what he had written.

"Correct. Now perhaps you had better practice with the ray producer until you are quite proficient. Remember that it operates, though not so strongly, through thin walls and glass provided they have not been specially protected. You can stand on one side of a wall and

render a man on the other side of the wall unconscious or dead."

The Martians handed him a ray-producing box, and let him practice with it, after fixing a safety catch that prevented it being turned so as to produce a fatal ray. It was a good thing they did, for he swept the ray too wide in his first attempt, and caught one of the arms of a Martian, causing it to hang uselessly at his side for some hours afterwards. But they only laughed at this, and said it did not matter.

A LITTLE while later, with the Professor's good wishes ringing in his ears, Donald and a Martian set out in the swiftly rolling sphere along the green-lined tunnels.

Elsa stayed behind. Fighting was not a woman's business.

They came out into the ancient surface city as the sun was beginning to shine slantingly through its walls. The sphere rolled through the wide, winding streets.

Donald thought he could see a sad, wistful look on their Martian compan-

ion's face within his air-helmet as he looked upon the lovely architecture his ancestors had built in the open, under the light of the sun. Now his race was confined to darkness and phosphorus-lit caverns underground, and the driver himself could stay here only a few minutes, for fear of the krypton forming bubbles in his blood.

The sphere stopped. They got out.

"I go," said the Martian. "Danger here for me."

The sphere rolled away.

They were alone again. The nerve-ray producer was in Donald's hands, the zekolo by his side. Ahead was a desperate battle against heavy odds.

But he knew that the longer he stopped to think about it the more his fears would mount and the harder it would be to start. Without a word he set out, firmly.

The zekolo came by his side. It had a fascinating way of walking, its many tentacles weaving in and out in a manner his eyes could not follow. When it came to a downward slope it withdrew inside its shell, closed itself up and

Don pressed the switch and
the man dropped to the sand



rolled on its edge, waiting for him at the bottom of the slope.

It carried a large reserve of oxygen in its lungs, so that it could move about without air for a long while.

He came to the edge of the black soot that surrounded the power-station. A man approached, but in the air-helmet he could not see whether he was white or Asiatic.

The man raised an arm in a signal for him to stop. He saw that he carried a rifle.

Don pressed his switch, and the man fell in the slow, deliberate way one falls on Mars.

Approaching, he saw that he was a dark-skinned Afghan, probably a sentry.

He would be all right there until evening, but when evening came he would have to be carried in before he froze.

That was one Asiatic accounted for. The success gave him confidence.

HE went on toward the mine buildings. There would be more danger there, for men would be able to see him before he saw them, and shoot from behind walls, or out of doorways. He would have to be very alert, and keep his eyes wide open.

A group of four men came out of the nearest building toward him. No doubt they had seen their comrade fall, and knew him for an enemy. One fired, and an explosive bullet sang past him to explode on the rocks beyond.*

He adjusted the ray, which he could see like a stream of pale pink smoke coming from his box, and the four sank to the ground as though they were overcome with weariness.

There was an explosion in front of

*Owing to the light gravity and very slight wind-resistance on Mars bullets travel in a practically straight line for a very long way. A good markman can easily hit a small target, such as a rabbit, at seven hundred yards.—Author.

him, and another to his right. The shots came from somewhere among the heap of crushed rock, waste products of the mine, just ahead. Someone was hiding there and sniping at him, but he could not see where the man was.

He swept the rubble heap with his ray, but the shots still came, some of them being uncomfortably close.

It was awkward. To come any closer was to be blown to pieces.

He thought of the zekolo beside him.

"Grahlee!" he ordered, pointing, and the creature set off rapidly, its tentacles drawn halfway inside its shell for protection.

Really, it was amusing to watch the way it ran, its many tentacles weaving in and out. It could travel swiftly, too.

The apparition of the weird creature charging toward their hiding-place was too much for the nerves of the two Asiatics who were lying among the rubble. They jumped up and ran in terror, dropping their rifles.

He brought one down, but the other disappeared among the buildings, the zekolo after him.

He wanted to call it back, but knew no word of command for the purpose. It had gone. It was curious how helpless and alone he felt without it.

Cautiously, he made his way among the buildings, expecting ambush everywhere. But instead of the host of enemies he had expected the place was extraordinarily deserted. Nobody was to be seen. They had all bolted in terror at the sight of the zekolo.

He arrived at the big house, where Thorwaldson and some of the white people were locked up. He rang the bell.

The bolts drew back, and he pulled open the air-tight door. A feeble puff of air came out at him.

It occurred to him that if anybody inside chose they might keep him imprisoned as long as they cared to in

these air locks. He would have to risk that.

The safety mechanism would not allow the second door to be opened until the outer one was fastened. If all the air rushed out of the building it might be fatal to anybody caught inside without an air-helmet and unable to shut himself or herself in an air-tight room in time.

The second door opened, and he went into the second air-lock. Then on to the third.

The fourth door was the last. Men might be waiting beyond that door, rifles or revolvers in hand. He played the ray through the door before he opened it.

It was well that he did so, for he found no fewer than six Asiatics lying in attitudes of repose on the floor, revolvers in their hands with which they had obviously been covering the door.

He strode through the building and went up in the elevator to the second floor. He knocked sharply on the door of Thorwaldson's room.

An irritated voice demanded, weakly, "What the devil do you want now?"

The door was locked. He had to go back to the front door and take the keys off the unconscious men before he could open it and let Thorwaldson and his companions out.

John Thorwaldson looked a broken, deflated figure, not the loud-voiced blusterer he usually was.

"Are you in league with these fellows?" were his first words.

Donald told his story rapidly.

"Oh, now you've done it! Now you've done it!" moaned Thorwaldson, when Donald finished. He waved his arms in despair.

Donald had expected relief and gratitude; all he got was hysterical abuse.

"What have I done wrong?"

"Can't you see what you've done, you

fool? The leader of those fellows is over there, in the building that controls the air-supply. He must have seen you come in here; he'll cut off our air supply! They've taken away all the air-helmets. We shall all suffocate!"

The women moaned.

"Not if they think that I have been safely killed or captured by the six guards," Donald reassured them.

"Six guards? There were eight. The other two must have slipped out while you were up here letting us out, you imbecile! They will tell him everything."

Donald now remembered having heard somebody moving about, but had been in too big a hurry to release the resident manager to stop to hunt for whoever it was.

As though to emphasize Thorwaldson's words a cloud of black smoke rose in the middle of the room, for no apparent reason.

Thorwaldson screamed.

"Oh, look what they've done! They've turned the exhaust of the power-plant into our air-pipe. Instead of air we shall get suffocating smoke! Instead of helping us you have killed us all!"

CHAPTER VIII

Donald Returns

"GET into an air-tight room as quickly as you can and block up the air-inlets," ordered Donald curtly. "Leave everything to me."

The others ran off. Thorwaldson glared at him then, seeming to realize that this was no time for argument, followed them in their search for temporary safety.

"And now what's next?" muttered Hargreaves to himself.

A noise at the other door drew his attention.

"Coming to pay me a visit, are they?"

he thought, grimly. "That suits me. I'll give them a warm welcome."

He worked the air-locks. As he pulled the switch to operate the last door he stood well away from it, using the leg of a chair. If his visitors started shooting through the door he wanted to be out of the way of the bullets.

But it was not a man that came through the door. It was the zekolo. By some means, probably by smelling his tracks, the creature had been able to trace him here. He patted its hard shell with pleasure.

"Good zeko," he said. "Clever boy."

An explosion sounded outside. Immediately afterwards came another.

"What are they doing now, bombarding the place?" he muttered.

A roar sounded in the air-locks as a bomb burst in the doorway. The Asiatics were blowing up the airlocks so as to let the air out of the building. That meant death for the six unconscious men on the floor.

He tried playing his nerve-ray on the wall of the building in the general direction of his unseen attackers, in the hope of catching them by chance; but the bombardment went on.

Presently the last door was burst open, and a mighty wind swept through the building as the air streamed out. The unconscious men on the floor stirred as they began to suffocate, then lay still in death, the air drained out of their lungs. Their faces went red and their hands waxy white.

"We've got to get out of here somehow, zeko," he said to the crustacean, who was feeling about the bodies, curiously. "And I think that if we tried to get out of the front door we wouldn't get far. They've got it covered."

He went up the stairs, as the elevator had stopped working. Through a window he could see Asiatics outside, surrounding the place.

"Why didn't I think of it before?" he muttered, and began stretching them unconscious by playing his ray through the glass. They dropped one after another.

When those who were still conscious discovered him and began bombarding his window he moved to another window.

"Go to sleep, my lads, go to sleep. Daddy's come to send you to bye-bye!"

It was a one-sided sort of fighting. He could stand well back inside a window, completely invisible from outside, and stretch unconscious, men who could not see what hit them.

Until presently the ray jammed. Either the charge was exhausted or else his inexperienced handling had made the mechanism go wrong. Whichever it was the lever refused to move. He struggled with it for a while, then gave it up as hopeless.

The house was full of smoke, and walls, floors and ceilings had a coating of soot. Many windows had been blown in by the explosive bullets. If the windows of the rooms where Thorwaldson or any of the others were hiding got broken that would be the end of them.

"We've got to do something, zeko," he said.

He took revolvers from the dead men on the floor.

"Got to meet 'em on even terms now, zeko. And I've never handled firearms before in my life."

It had been easy with the pink nerve-ray: he could see what that was playing on, but with an unaccustomed revolver he was sure he could not hit a barn door at ten yards.

"Got to do it, zeko," he said. "If we wait here they'll reduce the whole building to a heap of ruins. Perhaps there will not be many of them round the door now. We've got to make a dash for it. Grablee!"

The beast needed nothing further. It rushed out of the ruined doorway, Donald behind it.

The nerve of the Asiatics had been badly shaken by seeing so many of their number fall, as they thought, dead, for no apparent reason. In the superstitious way of uncivilized peoples, they had thought it to be witchcraft. And the sight of the weird, incomprehensible zekolo charging at them put the finishing touch to their fears. They bolted. One fired at it, but the bullet exploded on the amazingly tough shell without doing any harm. They fled into the mine, into the power-station, anywhere.

Donald found himself in possession of the field.

"Zeko! Come back zeko!"

Zeko came back when he found that his quarry had all got away.

"Good zeko! But we haven't finished our job yet. We've got plenty more to do yet. They still hold the air-plant. As long as the leaders of those fellows hold that building they control the settlement. We've got to get 'em out. We've got to capture the building, and without wrecking the air-plant. It's got to be, 'Grahlee!' again. Eh, damn it, I didn't expect the thing to dash away at once like that!"

For the fighting animal's blood was aroused. At the word of command it dashed off and began scraping at the door of the building that housed the air plant.

Donald watched. He didn't want to run into a trap. The creature would probably scrape for some time before anybody opened.

To his surprise, however, the door did open. He began to run, but it closed again before he reached it. The zekolo was inside, and he was outside.

He knocked on the door and rang, but there was no answer. From inside the building came the sound of several

explosions.

He waited and wandered around, becoming gradually more and more reckless. Minutes passed.

He saw the zekolo at the window, but no other sign of life. Was there nobody inside?

But somebody must have been there to let the zekolo in. And, from what he saw, the creature wanted to get out again, but could not.

"Awkward," he muttered.

He had to get in, but he must be careful not to do anything to damage the air-pumps or interfere with their working, for the life of the colony depended on them. It would not do to blow open a window and let the air out of the building.

But if he blew open a window of an air-tight room it might be all right. The mess-room at the back was air-tight, he remembered. He went to it and smashed the three-inch glass of the window with explosive bullets, then climbed in.

The air-tight door had closed automatically as the air rushed out of the broken window. He pushed it open with a big effort against the air-pressure, and emerged into the passage. It slammed shut instantly again.

"If anybody had been waiting for me here I'd have had no chance at all," he reflected.

He found the zekolo. Three of its tentacles had been blown off, but it seemed to take no notice of that. It waved its stumps and the sound tentacles as though to show how pleased it was to see him.

In various rooms and passages lay the leaders of the revolt, unconscious, knocked out by the zekolo.

DONALD slept better that night, after the feast that had celebrated the crushing of the mutiny. Most of

the Asiatics were safely locked up, but a few had been allowed to go on with their work. Order, as the customary phrase goes, was restored. Earth had heard the whole story by radio, and the culprits were awaiting transport back to Earth by the next rocket-ship.

Congratulations had been showered on Donald Hargreaves. He was the hero of the hour. He had spent a happy night dreaming of his wonderful future as the husband of the beautiful Elsa and son-in-law of the wealthy and influential John Thorwaldson.

The morning bell roused him, warning him that it was time to dress for breakfast. He dressed happily, wondering whether he would be expected to keep on with his clerical job or not. Probably he would for a little while, seeing how short the establishment was of clerks.

Somebody knocked on the door.

"A message from the old man," said the boy who entered, gazing at him in worship and handing him a strip of prepared zinc.

"Thanks," he said, mechanically.

It was unusual to send messages to men in their private rooms like this, and when such a message came it was usually bad news. He had an unpleasant sense of coming shock as he gazed at the metal strip. He was almost afraid to put it in into the machine to hear the manager's voice.

Then he reassured himself. What had he to fear, after what he had done? This foreboding was absurd, and merely due to association of ideas, a long-standing habit of thought.

He put it in the reproducing machine, and listened to the harsh, abrupt voice of John Thorwaldson.

"Hargreaves, after hearing my daughter's story I can only say that I am shocked and amazed that you should use the unfortunate chance that threw

you together to force your attentions on her. If it had not been for your courageous behavior yesterday I should have no hesitation in charging you with criminal assault and having you sent to prison. Your employment here ends today, and you will return to Earth in the next rocket-ship. Think yourself lucky that I am being so lenient with you."

He had to run the brutal message through the machine three times before he was sure that he had not misunderstood it. So that was the story Elsa had told? Forcing his attentions on her! Criminal assault!

He stared blankly before him. His world was in ruins. A man dismissed from a powerful organization like Martian Metals was bound to have a hard struggle to find other employment.

A bad time was before him.

And Elsa had told him that she loved him!

He dressed slowly like a man in a daze.

When he had dressed he decided he wanted no breakfast. Appetite for food had left him. Instead, he put on his fur clothes and air-helmet and went out.

He knocked at the door of the house where Elsa and her wealthy friends were staying after the wreck of the big house. He asked for Miss Thorwaldson, not expecting her to come. But she came, two armed footmen with her, two footmen who glared at him with open hostility.

"What is it?" she demanded, her manner bold and contemptuous.

In spite of himself he could not help admiring her brazen self-assurance. She showed no sign of shame or embarrassment.

"You know your father has dismissed me?"

She laughed.

"What else did you expect him to do?"

"You told him an untruthful story."

"I told him substantially the truth. You took an unfair advantage of me."

He stared, dumbly. Both she and the two men were alert, ready for some hostile action, but he did nothing. All energy seemed drained out of him, leaving him weary, sick and disgusted at what a base thing human nature can be, when men had no gratitude and women could pretend to love for selfish ends.

It was Elsa who spoke.

"Hargreaves," she said, and there was steel in her voice, "there is one quality that you do not possess. That is loyalty. You think only of rewards. I am loyal. I am loyal to my country and to my father. You forgot that."

His answer when it came surprised her.

"Miss Thorwaldson, you told me once that I should have been a Martian. Perhaps you were right. After this example of how one who should be one of the best samples of humanity can behave, I want no more to do with Earth or mankind. I'll become a Martian."

He went out through the air-locks.

She stared after him, wondering what

he meant; then understanding came to her, and she laughed, shortly.

DONALD HARGREAVES presented himself at the mine-head.

"Are there many men below?"

"About a score, I think, Mr. Hargreaves."

They spoke respectfully, but he reflected that if they knew he had been dismissed their tone would be very different.

"Will there be enough to clear the obstructions from tunnel 57?"

"The obstructions have already been removed, sir."

"Thanks."

He went into the cage.

"Good-bye," he said, as he began to go down.

And they wondered why he should say, "Good-bye!" not knowing that a man could decide to leave the Earth and her people forever; that, disgusted with the deceit and ingratitude of Earth he could walk with firm, unhurried step into the unknown, to live among aliens in the caverns around the sunken seas of another world.

» » THE CUCKOO IS A RACKETEER « «

One of the most curious of birds is the Cuckoo. It not only builds no nest of its own, but feasts its eggs on other species and has its young reared without trouble to itself, but to the great detriment of the rightful children of the foster-parents. When the time for laying approaches, the female Cuckoo goes to an already selected victim's nest, takes an egg from it with its beak, settles down and lays its own egg. Then it flies away with the stolen egg and either drops it at a distance or eats it. The whole maneuver takes but a few seconds and may be carried out despite the frantic efforts of the unwilling hosts to prevent.



WARNING TO CRANKS

If you want to stay cranky, look out for Star Single-edge Blades! They're so keen, they're so gentle with a tender skin that if you're not careful, you'll be smiling all over. Famous since 1880! Star Blades cost little: 4 for 10¢. Star Blade Division, Brooklyn, N. Y.



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